

Cameron Middle School into Cameron College Prep:
Lessons for LEAs from the First District-led Charter Phase-in Restart Model and Use of School
Improvement Grants in Tennessee

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On June 22, 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the new goal of turning around the bottom five percent of schools in the country. He appealed to charter authorizers across the country at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools;conference, proclaiming,

In some of these schools, the leadership has been replaced, but it hasn't made a difference. Many good teachers have left them and too few good teachers have replaced them. And many dedicated parents and ambitious students have also left and found other options. The social and physical conditions around some of these schools are horrific...There are approximately 5,000 schools in this chronically underperforming category, roughly 5 percent of the total...We need everyone who cares about public education to take on the toughest assignment of all and get in the business of turning around our lowest performing schools. That includes states, districts, nonprofits, for-profits, universities, unions, and charter organizations.

This shift in the direction of federal policy interventions prodded many districts to rethink their policies and to attempt profound changes to target these underperforming schools.

In January 2010, Metro Nashville Public Schools accepted this challenge and decided to pursue a charter school conversion of one of its lowest performing middle schools, Cameron Middle School. No Tennessee school district to this point had attempted this drastic move of turning over management to a charter operator and only four charter schools were operating in Nashville at this time. Cameron had failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP is a measure of performance under the federal No Child Left Behind) in six of the previous seven years. The Director of Charter and Private Schools, Alan Coverstone, presented his plan to embark on a transformational partnership to the elected school board in January. On March 3, the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Register, submitted his request to then Commissioner of Education, Dr. Tim Webb, for formal approval to transform the school.

LEAD Public Schools, a charter management organization from Nashville, was awarded the contract in April 2010 and worked through the details of conversion with MNPS throughout the summer. In July 2010, MNPS applied for a School Improvement Grant for Cameron Middle School and outlined the transformation plan to the MNPS school board. The majority of the SIG funds have been

directed at Cameron Middle School. LEAD and MNPS agreed to a phase-in charter conversion model with a planning year for 2010-2011. In the 2011-2012 school year, year 2 of the conversion, LEAD Public Schools opened Cameron College Prep for 5th graders while grades six through eight remained under district control.

This report covers the timeline spanning late 2009 to the summer of 2012 and the lessons learned from these contemporaneous reform models in the same building—the charter restart at Cameron College Prep and the turnaround efforts at Cameron Middle School. This brief timeline is explored in more detail in the following section based on interviews with key stakeholder. Three specific areas will be explored: the decision to pursue conversion as a turnaround strategy with LEAD Public Schools, the successes and struggles of the first year of implementation, and the lessons that can be gleaned from the use of School Improvement Grants and the School Program Grant. The interviews with six people who have been important in this turnaround effort from the district, Cameron Middle School, and Cameron College Prep took place in the summer of 2012. I interviewed:

- Alan Coverstone, Executive Director of Charter and Private Schools for the MNPS and current head of the Innovation District.
- Jeremy Kane, the Founder and CEO of Lead Public Schools
- Christopher Hames, principal of Cameron Middle School
- Julie Simone, the Professional Development Coordinator
- Anna Kucaj, the Transformation Facilitator for the planning year
- Tess Stoval, Transformation Facilitator in 2012¹

The Decision

The decision to convert this school began with a larger conversation to provide choices to students in low performing schools. Upon taking his job as the Director of Charter and Private Schools in fall 2009, Mr. Coverstone compared the proximity of schools available to families across Nashville to the schools' AYP statuses. He determined that there was one area where both the zoned middle school and

¹ More information on interviewees can be found in Appendix A.

the zoned high school were failing, entering Restructuring 2 of No Child Left Behind after the 2009-09 school year, and no high performing schools were easily accessible to families in that zone (Conversation with Mr. Coverstone). The State had issued a directive that once a school had fallen into the Restructuring 2 status (failing to meet AYP in 6 of the previous 7 years) that one option from Tennessee's School Improvement Plan was to "develop an alternative governance plan that is something like a charter" (ibid.). The high school had recently undergone a change in leadership and appeared to be showing progress, so Mr. Coverstone shifted his focus to provide a high performing middle school option for families in this zone, which led to the decision to transform Cameron Middle School.

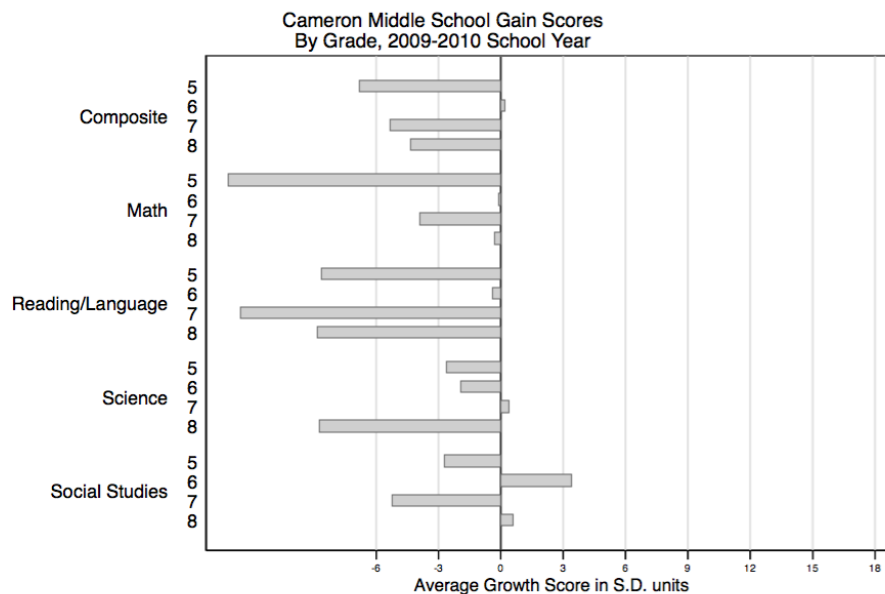
The data confirm Mr. Coverstone's description of the struggle at Cameron Middle School, which served 625 students in grades 5-8. Cameron served a diverse group of students, with 26% white students, 34% black, and 37% Hispanic. Over 95% of students in the school received free or reduced priced lunch, an indicator for poverty. In each grade in each subject, less than 30% of students performed at a proficient or advanced level in 2009-2010 (See Table 1).² Five hundred and ninety six students were tested in Reading/Language Arts and 565 students took the Math TCAP (29 students took the Algebra 1 End of Course Exam in 8th grade).

	Math (% Proficient/Advanced)	Reading/Language Arts (% Proficient Advanced)
5	8.5	19.8
6	13.4	29.2
7	22.8	16.3
8	3.3	13.8
Algebra 1	37.9	----

² The 2008-09 Achievement data are based on previously used assessments and are not as illustrative as the 2009-10 data because the tests were not as demanding. 5th grade: 86.9% of students in 08-09 were proficient/advanced in math (89% MNPS, 94.7% TN); 74% in Reading/Language Arts (88% MNPS, 94.8% TN). 6th grade: 93.1% Math (85% MNPS, 90.4% TN); 84% RLA (85% MNPS, 91% TN). 7th grade: 81.9% Math (82.1% MNPS, 90.3% TN); 81.3% RLA (87.2% MNPS; 91.5% TN). 8th grade: 82% Math (83% MNPS; 90% TN); 74.2% RLA (88.7% MNPS, 92.6% TN).

Cameron Middle School was not exhibiting signs of growth. Figure 1 shows that the school was below average in contributing to the growth of its students as measured by Value Added scores. The Tennessee Value Average Assessment System (TVAAS) calculates a projected test score for each student in each grade and subject based on her prior academic achievement and is normed so the average growth for a student in Tennessee is zero.³ In the figure, the gains for most grades in all subjects fall to the left of the state average, zero, suggesting that the school was growing student achievement at a less than average rate. These measures have some error associated with the gain score, which is about one standard deviation unit for each subject in each grade, so scores for 6th and 8th grade math, 6th grade reading, 7th grade science and 8th grade social studies do not differ significantly from the state average. Nonetheless, it is apparent that as students enter Cameron in 5th grade, they experience large negative gains, and those gains do not improve as students move through the school.

Figure 1



³ See http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/test_results.shtml for more information on TVAAS.

Around this same time period, in January 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly convened for a special session to change laws to fit the Department’s application for the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top competition. To support this application, the legislature created the Achievement School District that would be one tool used to turn around the bottom 5% of schools in the State, in part by removing them from district oversight. Cameron Middle School was eligible for placement in the Achievement School District.

MNPS sought to maintain control over its lowest performing schools and chose to send out a request for proposals for a charter organization to transform the Cameron Middle School into a public charter school. MNPS cites the *Turnaround Challenge* by education consulting group, Mass Insight, Inc., funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as the blueprint for how it came to approach turning around low-performing schools. This report argues that states and districts have been guilty of “light touch strategies that failed over time because they focused on only one aspect of the problem rather than addressing underlying systems and operating conditions.”⁴ On February 1, 2010, Mr. Coverstone released a request for proposals for charter operators to transform Cameron Middle School into a charter school, with a deadline of February 28.

Application Process

While *Turnaround Challenge* presents a number of strategies, finding experienced operators with a “demonstrated record of success” who employ those strategies proved difficult. Mr. Coverstone tried to recruit operators from across the nation. In the end, three operators, one from the District of Columbia, one from Memphis, and one from Nashville, LEAD Public Schools, submitted applications to the Office of Charter and Private Schools by the deadline. Each organization was encouraged to come up with their own timeline and plans for conversion. Like other charter applications, the decision to

⁴ The full report can be found at <http://www.massinsight.org/stg/research/challenge/>

recommend an operator is made by an independent committee, which presents its findings and suggestions to the elected school board whose nine members vote whether to grant the charter. Mr. Coverstone presented the committee's selection of LEAD Public Schools to the school board to lead the transformational partnership on April 13, 2010.

The school board voiced a number of concerns about the decision to pursue a charter partnership and the committee's recommendations. The board had only permitted four charter schools to open in Nashville at this point, one of which was LEAD Public Schools' existing charter school, LEAD Academy. For this partnership, the number and quality of applicants became a concern to some members of the school board. Ms. Gracie Porter, a member of the school board, expressed the board's skepticism of whether LEAD Academy's three years of operation constituted a demonstrated track record of reform, arguing, "Even though we have some test data, we really don't have a record, so to speak" (School Board Minutes, April 13, 2010). Mr. Coverstone argued that LEAD's "potential to lead the Partnership far exceeds the school's test scores" (School Board Minutes, April 13, 2010). Further, he suggested that the planning year that LEAD had requested would allow them to develop the capacity and a context-driven plan with community input and support.

One hurdle that was unanticipated was the name of the school. Mr. Kindall, representing the school zone where the district was located pressed Mr. Coverstone about what the name of the new school would be. Cameron is named after a prominent African American teacher who was killed during World War II. However, the building, not the school in its current form, was of particular importance to the alumni association. The school was one of the first African American high schools in the city. Since 1980, the school had been a middle school, but the alumni association kept an office in the school where city championship trophies in football and basketball as well as pictures of its graduating classes were on display. Mr. Coverstone assured the board that the school would keep the name and mascot.

LEAD pledged to involve Cameron alumni and to call the school Cameron College Prep. After postponing the vote to its next meeting, the school board granted the charter to LEAD Public Schools.

Decision to accept

LEAD's decision to accept was contingent on the district meeting their demands. Mr. Kane, the principal and founder of LEAD Academy, led the process for LEAD Public Schools to apply for the transformation partnership. LEAD Academy served a different population of predominantly African American low-income students in a different area of the city, North Nashville, so it did not have experience educating English Language Learners who were the majority of students in the new school. In 2009-2010, LEAD Academy was 89% African American and 3% Hispanic, whereas Cameron Middle School was 34% African American and 37% Hispanic. He also reached out to the successful charter organization leaders (Green Dot, Mastery) across the country to improve his understanding of conversion and educating Limited English Proficient students to develop a plan for the transformation partnership.

Mr. Kane worked to convince LEAD's board of directors to attempt this turnaround model. The chairman and vice-chairman of the board were skeptical of the plan to join this transformation partnership with MNPS and turn around Cameron and of growing too fast. He explains that "Everyone was committed to doing more for the city...but at this point, [we had a] 5th through 8th grade, about 215 students, not really the track record or resume to say we are ready to expand" (Conversation with Mr. Kane). Once they decided to apply, their biggest concern was that they would not be able to take over all the grades at once and they would need a planning year. Mr. Kane learned from Green Dot schools in

California⁵ that to take over the school all at once would make it difficult for them to develop the organization or implement their plan.

Green Dot's suggestions motivated LEAD to apply for the phase-in model. Thus, LEAD's proposal to convert Cameron was a 5 year phase-in model with a planning year in year 1, assuming control of 5th grade in year two, and adding one grade per year. MNPS, however, was hoping for a more rapid turnaround model. Yet, the timing and politics worked in their favor. Around the time of the decision, in Rhode Island, the superintendent, Deb Gist, was going to fire every teacher at an underperforming high school: the teachers organized, the community spoke out, and President Obama denounced the plan. LEAD told MNPS that if it were not to have a planning year, it would be forced to dismiss the entire fifth grade staff because part of their plan is the autonomy to hire its own teachers. He argued to the district that "we want to grow gradually, we think that's better for the students, better for the staff, and we think it's better for the community" (Conversation with Mr. Kane). The planning year would give them the ability to hire a principal who would have a year to develop relationships in the community and a context-driven plan specific to Cameron. LEAD also argued that the planning year would allow the teachers who wished to stay at Cameron an opportunity to hone their skills and apply to the charter

⁵ Green Dot sought to do a full-school turnaround for a high school which encountered a number of obstacles, which they argue, could have been avoided if they had used a phase-in method rather than the full-school turnaround. Mr. Kane described their process:

But then, they broke out the 9th grade from their 10th, 11th, and 12th and they essentially created phase-in schools starting in the ninth grade. So, they said these 10th 11th and 12th graders, we can give them improvement, but it's limited...Ninth grade, though, those are new students to Locke, we are going to create this new school for them. They had this great chart where it's their phase-in phase-out model where they did these, similar version of academies, not with a theme that Nashville does, but these academies of 9th grade academies which are considered their new schools. So, they broke Locke up into 4 academies of ninth graders and then they had these 4 schools, essentially, within it, and then they had 10th, 11th and 12th sort of together as one school. So, as those ninth grades grew that other academy grew away.

school. Once MNPS structured the contract to meet their mutual needs, the LEAD board agreed to pursue the partnership. The timeline for transformation can be found in Appendix B. MNPS settled upon a two prong strategy, turning around the school for students currently enrolled and the charter restart for those entering 5th grade in 2011.

School Improvement Grant

Mr. Coverstone was concerned that the transformation might be problematic because the charter school would not directly affect the students that were already in the school. While the partnership called for LEAD to be responsible for the phase-in, students assigned to Cameron Middle School for the 2010-2011 school year would never have the option of attending the chartered school. To manage the transformation and provide additional capacity to improve the quality of the education for these students, Mr. Coverstone developed a two million dollar School Improvement Grant application with Mr. Kane. School Improvement Grants are three-year federal grants that flow through the Tennessee Department of Education to implement specific strategies that will be used to turnaround persistently low-performing schools. MNPS and LEAD agreed that the charter would forfeit the SIG funds so that its focus could be exclusively on the students in the Cameron Middle School who would not attend the charter school. LEAD, in turn, applied for the Charter School Program Planning and Implementation Grant, for which it received six hundred thousand dollars. The SIG had been used in the past in MNPS and lessons learned from those experiences were that a short-term rush of funds should not be used on classroom personnel, but on attempts to make more lasting change. Previous attempts at using the funds for personnel had resulted in “sugar rush” improvements that quickly fade out after the three years of funding runs out (Conversation with Mr. Coverstone).

To establish meaningful and sustainable collaboration, the SIG outlines 8 pillars on which the transformation plan rests:

- 1) A bold whole school transformation
- 2) A charter school restart
- 3) Extended learning opportunities for students
- 4) A broad community school
- 5) A unique leadership team
- 6) A unique charter agreement
- 7) A focused benchmark and assessment plan
- 8) Cluster alignment and collaboration

The SIG presents explicit plans and benchmarks to monitor the implementation and success of the grant. The SIG elucidates the two distinct reform strategies for the two schools colocating the Cameron building.

As the partnership began, Mr. Coverstone studied the state reports from previous years and found that Cameron teachers in the school were consistently requesting embedded professional development in their reviews of school operations. In 2008, MNPS increased the number of faculty allotted to Cameron, but did not explicitly offer training and development to these teachers. To address this need, Mr. Coverstone brought Lipscomb University into the partnership to provide guidance in the transformation and a liaison between the university and Cameron who would serve as the Professional Development Coordinator. The PD Coordinator would work full time in the school with the teachers and principal to provide embedded professional development. The full transformational partnership includes MNPS, LEAD Public Schools, and Lipscomb University.

Mr. Coverstone focused the SIG funds on human capital training and technology, which would endure as the school transitioned from a traditional public to a charter school. The “Lipscomb piece” is the largest component of the School Improvement Grant. Out of the two million dollar grant, over \$750,000 over the course of the three years is allocated to this partnership. These funds are allocated for the salary of the PD coordinator, the on-site offerings of professional development, resources, ELL materials, and activities for team building. Julie Simone coordinates the professional development that Lipscomb does with the teachers at Cameron Middle School with the cooperation of and collaboration

with the principal and the Dean of Lipscomb University's School of Education, Dr. Candace McQueen. A second personnel addition that came out of the School Improvement Plan was the transformation facilitator. Anna Kucaj took on this role in November 2010 after some delays with the SIG funding. Her main duties were first, to ensure fidelity of the School Improvement Grant; second, to serve as the liaison between Cameron Middle School and Cameron College Prep; and third, to interface with the MNPS central office for both Cameron Middle and CCP.

The turnaround reform model requires the replacement of the principal in the school as it transitions to a charter school. Mr. Coverstone invited Mr. Kane to be part of the interview process, but the decision of whom to hire was left to Mr. Coverstone. Many of the stakeholders cited that the main benefit of a new principal in a turnaround model was that he maintains no ties to the school as it was formerly constituted and can be fully committed to implementing the School Improvement Plan without feeling as if the plan was in direct response to his leadership. Mr. Coverstone selected Mr. Chris Hames, who came into the role as a first time principal, in July 2010, after the SIP for Cameron had been submitted for the 2010-11 school year. He was selected "with specific attention to the recent history of the school, experience, in an urban environment, . . . complete understanding of the specifics of the transformation at Cameron and a clear desire to participate in innovative redesign, ability to manage and coordinate school staff with a focus on positive culture-building, and a desire to engage and reach out to cultivate new community and family connections with school" (School Improvement Grant Application, p. 8).

The Planning Year (2010-11)

With a new source of funding, a new transformational facilitator, a new professional development coordinator, and a new principal, the transformation began in August of 2010. These new additions to the school would constitute the core transition team with Mr. Kane, the Chief Operating

Officer of LEAD Public Schools, Mr. Reynolds, and Mr. Coverstone. In late fall 2010, Mr. Kane hired Mr. Edon Katz as the first principal of Cameron College Prep and he joined the transformation team.

Meetings occurred weekly during the summer of 2010 and throughout the school year. As the Transformation Facilitator for the planning year, Ms. Kucaj explained that the meetings were essential to measure the progress of the logistical and operational aspects of the conversion. With two schools colocating the building, many meetings focused on uses of time and space. Ms. Kucaj explained that there was a “need to figure out how to get two schools into one building, so, we would talk about the physical arrangement of the building, then, how does it work [for CCP] to get to lunch without disrupting the sixth grade, then, how to schedule lunch—we started big picture and more questions would arise.”

One aspect of the transformation facilitator’s role was to bring the two sides to the table, coordinate these discussions, and find areas of agreement that worked for both Mr. Katz and Mr. Hames. For example, CCP did not want interruptions from the PA system, so the Transformation Facilitator had to arrange for the PA to be disconnected from the areas of the school where they would be located. The use of the library is another area where it was necessary to coordinate between the two schools. The two sides agreed to place the fifth graders, who would be attending CCP, and the sixth graders, who would remain in Cameron Middle School, on the same floor as the library. The planning year was necessary to create an agreed upon set of rules for the use of that space. Finally, CCP would be instituting a longer school day, so a master schedule for the building needed to be agreed upon. The two schools had different programs, different expectations, and different protocol, and the transformation facilitator was essential to maintain communication and transparency to allow the schools to pursue their programs. For the principals, this coordination was one aspect of their role as school leaders, so the Transformation Facilitator enabled Mr. Hames to focus on the teachers and students at Cameron Middle and for Mr. Katz to prepare for the opening of CCP. The transformation facilitator also supports the principals through maintaining the data dashboard, which was developed by the research group,

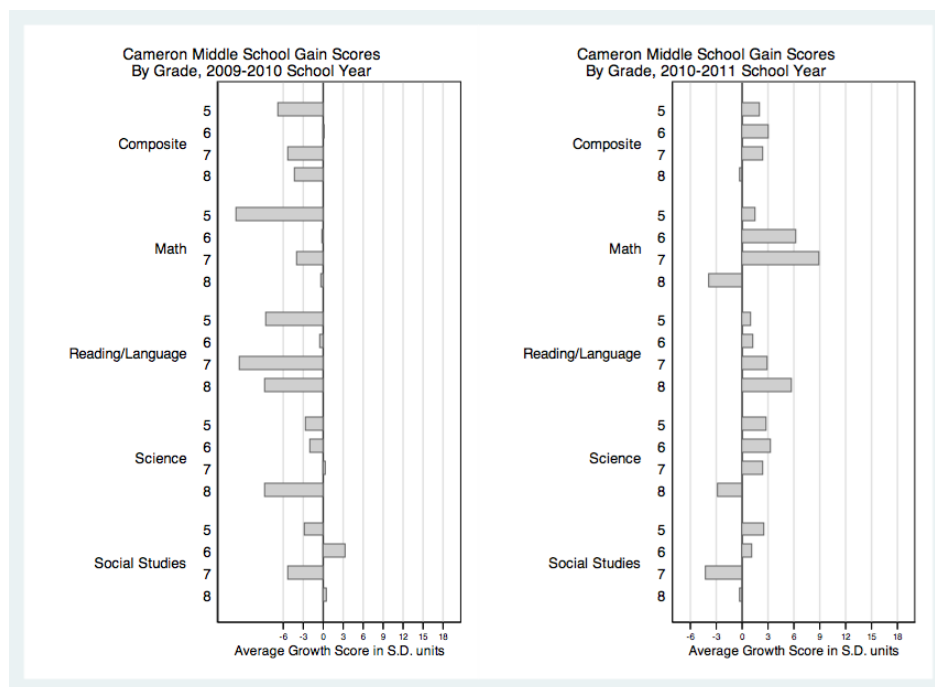
Public Impact. The system includes discipline, assessment, attendance, enrollment, and teacher evaluation data. The data dashboard was updated quarterly and the results were delivered to the principals.

Mr. Hames shared this information with Ms. Simone and the teachers to inform decisions and professional development plans during the first year. The School Improvement Plan emphasized the role of the embedded professional development in training teachers to become leaders in other turnaround efforts as well as improve their instruction for the students at Cameron. In the planning year, Ms. Simone, working with Dr. McQueen or other faculty from Lipscomb, helped each teacher to develop an Individualized Professional Development Plan. Ms. Simone offered voluntary sessions before and after school to target specific areas that teachers had identified such as creating lesson plans and assessments, backwards design, differentiated instruction, classroom management, and understanding the standards. Professors from Lipscomb were paired with teachers. Ms. Simone also was available for hands-on training through co-teaching to help implement the practices from the professional development. While many teachers took advantage of these opportunities, for which they received exception pay through the SIG, many teachers opted not to use these voluntary resources in the first year.

The students at Cameron Middle School appear to have benefited in 2010-2011 relative to the 2009-2010 school year. Figure 2 compares the growth for students in each grade and subject for both years. On the left, the results from the 2009-10 school year (same as Figure 1) are displayed as a comparison to the overall positive growth in the 2010-11 scores on the right. Aside from the 8th grade, positive gains are seen in each grade for math and science. In Reading/Language Arts, small, insignificant gains are seen for fifth graders, but for grades 6-8, the school produced positive gains. Social Studies gains were mixed. Some of this progress may be due to regression to the mean due to the large,

negative gains in most grades in 2009-10, but overall, the students appeared to be heading in the right direction, suggesting that the changes at Cameron may have benefited the students. However, without a true counterfactual (to see how these students would have performed without these changes), it is impossible to estimate which programs were most effective in increasing student achievement.

Figure 2



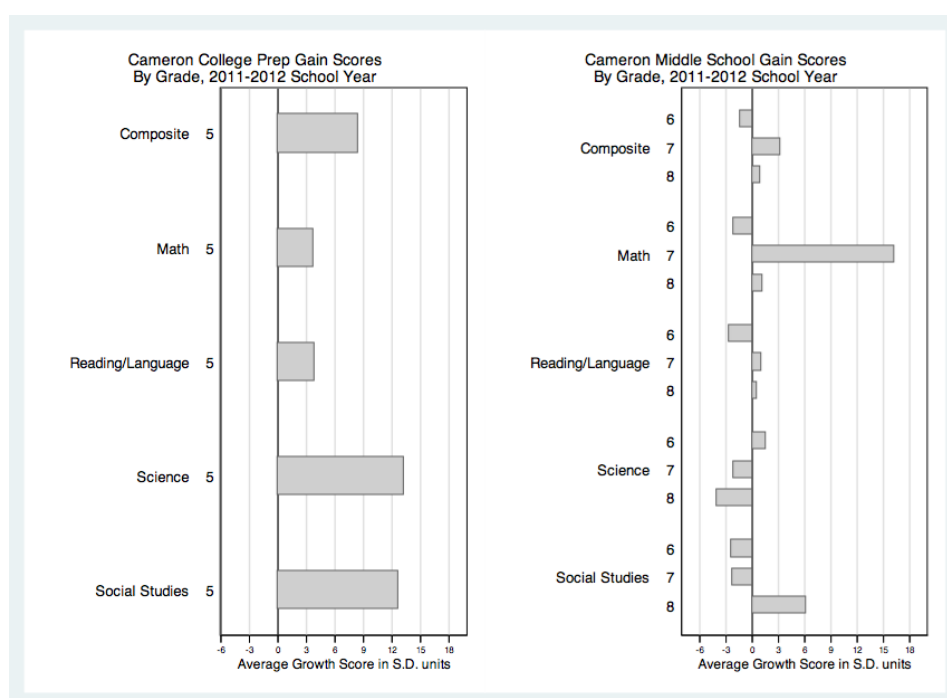
While Mr. Hames and Ms. Simone were focused on the students at Cameron, LEAD Public Schools was focused on building credibility in the community. Before the planning year began, Mr. Coverstone organized an event for parents at Lipscomb University to explain the changes that would be happening in the school. LEAD Public Schools hired an outreach director, who went door to door in the communities around Cameron to explain the partnership to parents. Mr. Kane cited the work of one board member, Judge Dinkins from the Tennessee Court of Appeals, who went out into the community with the charter application in hand and met with church groups to explain LEAD's plan for Cameron College Prep. CCP also worked with Cameron Middle School to fill its teaching positions, as two teachers from Cameron Middle School were hired to teach fifth grade for the 2011-12 school year at CCP.

Year Two (2011-2012)

The first year of colocation brought about a new set of challenges. Ms. Kucaj, the transformation facilitator, left her position at the beginning of the school year in fall 2011. The new transformation facilitator, Ms. Tess Stoval, did not begin until March 2012. The data dashboard was not updated and transformation team meetings were not held regularly during this time. However, Using SIG funds, Cameron Middle School instituted e testing, a formative testing system that CCP also used. On top of the spots lost to the charter, 15 additional teaching positions were removed at Cameron Middle School. For Ms. Simone and Mr. Hames, this shift meant they “had exactly who wants to come back.” Out of 17 teachers, four were veterans, the rest had less than three years experience. The professional development sessions became mandatory and a common language that was used in the TEAM rubric guided the professional development. The sessions became increasingly individualized with support from Lipscomb faculty. For example, Ms. Simone explains, the Tuesday sessions would teach a skill, such as grouping, and on Wednesday, the teachers were implementing the skill into the lesson plans in a meaningful way. However, Ms. Simone received feedback from teachers that the mandatory before school lessons became too onerous. Both Mr. Hames and Ms. Simone felt that the uncertainty of the transformation model hurt morale in the second year for the teachers who were concerned about their future plans. According to Ms. Simone, the message of developing teacher leaders at Cameron was not well conveyed to the teachers. In response, Mr. Hames and Ms. Simone focused their recruiting efforts for the 2012-13 year on Teach for America teachers who sign up for a two-year commitment, which ends at the same time as the school has been phased out.

At CCP, information on teacher practices and attitudes was not available for this year. Mr. Katz was not interviewed for this piece as he had assumed the principal’s role for LEAD Public Schools’ second partnership with MNPS at Brick Church Academy. Nonetheless, the results of the 2012 TCAP demonstrate positive outcomes the first year of CCP. The next set of graphs display the performance of

Cameron Middle School and Cameron College Prep for the 2011-2012 school year. On the left, the bar graph shows the gain scores for the fifth graders who attend Cameron College Prep and shows positive gains for students in all tested subjects on the TCAP. The Cameron Middle School scores show more inconsistency in Year 2 of the SIG than it did in 2010-2011.



Lessons from the Cameron Turnaround

Despite the mixed academic results at Cameron Middle School, there are a number of takeaways that could be applicable to other turnaround efforts. Mr. Coverstone emphasized the role of the transformation facilitator to harness all the moving pieces in a conversion model and to break down barriers to flexibility. The vision needs to be clear and the goal should be to “communicate to principals what effective schools look like, but allow them the flexibility to do it.” Leaders need to reinforce continually that there is no direct clash between the charter operator and the school in a phase-in model as the charter operator is recruiting students who have not yet entered the school. The Cameron

turnaround provides many insights for human capital development. Mr. Coverstone reiterated the need for clear and open communication with teachers in regard to the annual assessment and redesign. Mr. Hames argued that turnaround teachers should be provided extra support to find other opportunities if they decide that the turnaround is not for them. Hiring transient, young, but effective, teachers has proven to be a strategy that Mr. Hames has embraced as the school is being phased out.

All stakeholders are interested in fostering collaboration in the transformation partnership. It appears that the leaders may not be the optimal level for collaboration as they are concerned with implementing their programs in their schools. Ms. Stovall believes that teachers are a natural place for collaboration and the use of common assessments and a shared language of instruction can facilitate these interactions. Ms. Simone described how Cameron Middle School teachers would use terminology that they picked up from CCP teachers, such as “Live above the line” to reinforce appropriate school behavior. When one school has events for students, such as authors or speakers, it is advisable to invite students from the other school. Mr. Coverstone shares another lesson for the phasing out school to be more intentional in establishing the coaching collaborative and interpersonal cultural issues. Sharing physical education equipment and co-planning sporting events are another way to foster collaboration in the school.

Community and parent engagement offers a fruitful area for collaboration that can continue to be developed. Both schools have generated a positive presence in the community. Ms. Simone, despite having not worked with the students at Cameron College Prep, plainly states that she knew all the CCP students because she “was in the neighborhood all the time and they are the little siblings of my kids...They are all our families.” In fact, it is important for the schools to work together with the families. For many of the families who are zoned to Cameron, this transformation is their first experience with MNPS and the idea of conversion is foreign to them. To support their involvement and engagement,

Cameron Middle School reached out to them, opening the computer lab for Arabic and Spanish speaking students and their families to use Rosetta Stone, and planning specific events for their benefit and education. Groups which specialize in career training have been brought into the school to meet with families. One successful instance of collaboration in the area of linguistic resources was sponsoring events with the Center for Resources for Immigrants in Tennessee and Conexión Américas. At the request of parents, in particular, the non-English speaking parents who were having difficulty disciplining their children, the school invited Metro Police and social workers to discuss best practices for raising middle school children. This event was offered once in Arabic and once in Spanish and was the most attended event. Numerous other community partners that work with the community, such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters, United Neighborhood Health Services, and the Oasis Center, have all worked with the schools as part of their community initiatives.

Best Practices for the SIG grant

The goal for School Improvement Grant was to create lasting, sustainable investments in the Cameron community. Mr. Coverstone developed the plans for the first year of the grant, but Mr. Hames adapted the plans for the grant in subsequent years to fit the school context. All stakeholders cited the Lipscomb partnership as a successful use of the money, but such a partnership may not be replicable or cost effective for other contexts—over a third of the grant over the course of three years went toward the Lipscomb partnership. Investments in technology, such as WiFi, benefitted both the students at Cameron Middle and the students at Cameron College Prep. In particular, context specific needs, such as Rosetta Stone, have proven to be successful uses of the funds. This investment provides an opportunity to engage parents who may not have experience of interacting and participating in life at the school. The addition of MAP tests, so both schools use similar benchmark tests, may facilitate collaboration between staffs at the two schools as they share a common language in discussing student outcomes. This shared language is furthered by the funding of Expeditionary Learning at Cameron Middle School, which creates

a sense of community within the school. Expeditionary Learning at Cameron Middle School may provide teachers with experience as their positions are phased out to easily transfer into CCP, which also uses the program. Mr. Hames altered the plans for the grant to add staff in year two. To provide more faculty with the opportunity to participate in the professional development may make this investment sustainable, but increasing the number of staff positions may not be appropriate in all contexts. Mr. Hames also sought to implement a research-driven, successful reading curriculum, READ 180. However, Mr. Hames explains that the funding was delayed until February of the 2011-2012 school year. Teachers had planned during the summer of 2011 to use this resource as the main reading curriculum, so they were forced to come up with alternate lessons during the year. Ms. Simone and Mr. Hayes suggested that the difficulty and uncertainty of whether the program would be implemented might have contributed to the lower reading and language arts performance on the TCAP. Ensuring timely disbursement of funds is essential for any of the programs funded through the SIG to succeed.

Cameron Middle School and the Cameron College Prep operate two schools in the same building and have encountered a number of challenges that came along with being the first to implement this dual turnaround method of a restart and transformation. The policy, as envisioned by Mr. Coverstone, sought to anticipate these challenges by hiring a transformational facilitator, but for most of year 2, this position was not filled. Mr. Coverstone's vision, Mr. Hames' leadership, and the community driven focus of Mr. Kane has nonetheless led to many successes. Focusing on community engagement and articulating a clear vision to the faculty appear to be at the top of this list. The investment in sustainable and lasting improvements through developing teachers who can act as leaders in other turnaround efforts has been a struggle at Cameron Middle School. Efforts to support these teachers and communicate that vision must continue to be a priority. As other LEAs embark upon turning around low-performing schools, school leaders must focus on constant communication and transparency to create environments where students, families, and teachers can thrive.

Appendix A: More information on interviewees

Participant	Short Biography
Mr. Coverstone	The Director of Charter and Private Schools for MNPS oversees 10 schools as well as chartering authorization. The ten schools are part of what they call an “Innovation Cluster” where he acts as a Superintendent for these schools within the larger District. When this school was transformed, it was the first school over which he had oversight; since then, they have added nine schools who have a history of low-performance and work with the State Department of Education. His previous experience was as a member of the MNPS School Board, which he gave up to assume this job in 2009, and as the Dean of Studies at a local private school.
Mr. Kane	The CEO of LEAD Public Schools currently runs 5 schools in Nashville. When the transformation occurred, he was the principal of one of the first charter schools in Nashville and it was the only school in his organization. He attended Stanford University for Undergraduate and received his Master’s in Public Policy from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University before opening the original LEAD Academy.
Mr. Hames	The Principal of Cameron Middle School was hired as a first-year principal in 2010 before the planning year of the transformation. He had experience as a vice-principal at a suburban, wealthy public school. He signed a 5 year contract to lead this new school through the transformation
Ms. Simone, The Director of Professional Development/Liaison	The Liaison has spent almost 20 years as a teacher in this district before assuming the role at this school. She has worked one on one with each of the teachers at Cameron as a mentor and leads their professional development. Her job description is as follows: The PD Coordinator focuses on implementation of the IEP’s created by the audit team. Implementation consists of matching resources with teacher development needs as delineated in each IEP. The PD Coordinator will specifically work with the other instructional coaches to determine best use of time and resources for specified needs. The PD Coordinator in collaboration with the instructional coaches will create embedded PD opportunities that focus on best practices and put student learning and engagement first.
Ms. Kucaj, Transformational Facilitator 1	The original transformational facilitator at Cameron was hired in September 2010 to facilitate the process. She worked in this position until the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year when the Director promoted her to a job within his new department. The Facilitator’s job description suggests that her role is to: “manage the implementation and coordination of the personnel and activities associated with the Transformation Model for Cameron. The Transformation Facilitator is responsible for managing the School Improvement Grant, ensuring effective coordination of the Transformation Team composed of the school’s principal, the University professional development liaison, the charter management organization, and the Office of Charter and Private Schools. The position exists to ensure fidelity in

	implementation of the Transformation model described in the School Improvement grant process, and ensure clear communication with families, teachers, and community members concerning implementation of management and other changes during the transition to charter management of the school.”
Ms. Stovall, Transformational Facilitator 2	Ms. Stovall began in this role in March of 2012, which means that this role was not filled for six months during the first year of operation of the charter school.

Appendix B: Timeline

Year	School (Grades)
2010-2011	Cameron Middle School (5-8)
	Cameron College Prep (Planning Year)
2011-2012	Cameron Middle School (6-8)
	Cameron College Prep (5)
Time of Report	
2012-2013	Cameron Middle School (7-8)
	Cameron College Prep (5-6)
2013-2014	Cameron Middle School (8)
	Cameron College Prep (5-7)
2014-2015	Cameron Middle School (Phased Out)
	Cameron College Prep (5-8)

Research on School Turnaround

Research on possible policy directions to improve underperforming schools is unfortunately sparse and has failed to produce consistent, positive results. Malen et al. (2002) delve into the theory and explain the process one district took to reconstitute six schools. They find that the “theory of action” embedded in reconstitution reforms is risky, and potentially flawed, and suggest, “The actual effect may be to harm rather than help ‘low performing’ schools.” Despite this warning, they offer three suggestions for districts to pursue reconstitution reforms: “ (a) incorporate incentives to attract and retain experienced administrators and master teachers, (b) grant staffs the time, autonomy and opportunity to envision alternative organizational designs, and (c) dedicate sufficient informational and human resources to the experiment ” (Malen et al. 2002). These studies conclude that merely replacing school staffs does not lead to improved instructions, has little effect on quality, school organization, or student performance (Malen et al. 2002).

Others have sought to learn from experience outside the education sector. Hess and Gift (2008) surveyed the literature on turn around models in the corporate world and found results are rarely positive. They find that only about one-fourth of businesses that undertook turnaround initiatives were able to institute major changes in their structure and management, and many of those were not able to show increased economic performance (ibid.). Also from the business literature, Clayton Christiansen’s *Disrupting Class* suggests that innovation rarely occurs within the confines of the old organizational structure, but has been shown to be more likely to be successful when pressed or instituted from some disruptive, outside force. His book seeks to apply lessons of companies who were pressured by disruptive forces to adapt and change to the education sector. While the book focuses on education technology as that disruptive force, some lessons can be garnered for less digital forms of innovative turnaround practices.

While the research on innovative practices and charter transformations can guide the analysis of the implementation of the turnaround strategy in Nashville, the assumption that these characteristics alone will improve the education options of children in low-income, minority, and immigrant communities is weak. Many school improvement strategies tend to ignore the “underlying issues of poverty, ill-health, student mobility, parent availability and other conditions that shape the life chances and the learning opportunities of children and youth (Malen et al, 2002, p. 127).

Sources:

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